

John Joyce, M.D.
13th District of Pennsylvania



Committee on Homeland Security
Committee on Small Business

May 11, 2020

The Honorable Tom Wolf
Governor of Pennsylvania
508 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Wolf,

This spring, the coronavirus outbreak and subsequent mitigation mandates have taken a toll on Pennsylvanians in every community of our commonwealth, spurring economic, social, and health challenges. As the only physician serving in Pennsylvania's Congressional delegation, I am concerned that your administration's aggressive COVID-19 mitigation strategy has resulted in secondary health crises across the commonwealth – including tragic deaths that could have been prevented.

Under strict stay at home orders, Pennsylvanians have avoided health care facilities, non-elective procedures, and even emergency services. In too many cases, delayed diagnosis directly resulted in negative patient outcomes as Pennsylvanians needlessly suffered or succumbed to illnesses that could have been prevented if they had sought care. Recently, I heard from fellow physicians that they have seen a substantial increase in cardiac deaths. In 21st century America – even during a pandemic – no one should fear seeking medical emergency help for chest pain or other heart attack symptoms.

Additionally, this prolonged period of isolation and lack of access to usual in-person resources for those in recovery have resulted in an uptick of substance abuse and addiction. Thanks to investments that Congress has made to stem the tide of opioid abuse in the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act and other legislative solutions, our communities in central Pennsylvania recently experienced a decrease in overdose deaths. After too many years of climbing death tolls, I am concerned that overdose deaths will again increase as Pennsylvanians avoid emergency services during the coronavirus outbreak, squandering the progress that we have made.

As select Pennsylvania counties begin to transition into the yellow phase of reopening this month, many others remain under your administration's stay at home order. During this extended period of aggressive mitigation, I urge you to consider all of the health care needs of your constituents and to take action to prevent additional negative outcomes and tragic deaths.

Specifically, I encourage you to explicitly communicate to Pennsylvanians that physician offices, medical practices, and especially emergency medical services are essential, and that they should seek care if needed, especially if facing an emergency such as a heart attack or potential overdose. Additionally, I encourage you and the Pennsylvania Department of Health to communicate directly with the providers on the front lines of the health care system, and to address their concerns about patients' lack of access to important care.

Furthermore, as you consider lifting stay at home orders and other aggressive mitigation tactics in eastern Pennsylvania, I urge you to prioritize the health care needs of your constituents.

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Even with the increased use of telemedicine and other alternatives, many Pennsylvanians – especially our seniors – rely on in-person appointments with physicians for care and guidance. For the sake of these Pennsylvanians, I ask that you to allow physicians to reinstate in-person visits as expeditiously as possible.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. As all levels of government continue to combat the public health and economic ramifications of coronavirus, I look forward to working with you to protect the people of Pennsylvania from these dangers. Please do not hesitate to contact my office at (814) 656-6081 with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Joyce". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John Joyce, M.D.
Member of Congress